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SUBJECT: Bahamas Changes Position on Country-Specific Resolution
Fearing Reprisals

REF: STATE 116264

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11. (C) SUMMARY: A senior GCOB official told the CDA that the government's position on the Iran Human Rights Resolution changed due to international pressure they received about their own domestic policies, U.S. criticism of their off-shore banking industry, and what they perceived as unwarranted criticism in the Human Rights Report. The Director General (DG) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted that The Bahamas is fearful of "becoming a target" of similar country-specific resolutions and prefers to use the Human Rights Council (HRC) to address human rights issues. The DG affirmed that their break from previous years support for the resolution was the result of a deliberate internal review, however, this would not preclude later reevaluation of their vote on a case-by case basis. The DG qualified this sudden change on country specific resolutions by reiterating that their vote should not be interpreted as a vote against the U.S. or their own commitment to human rights. END SUMMARY.

Abstained on Principle - Will Monitor Based on Human Rights
Commission Results

12. (C) In a terse meeting with Charge Zuniga-Brown on November 23, DG Joshua Sears detailed that the GCOB performed an internal review at the highest levels leading up to this year's UN Third Committee. The DG said that their decision to abstain on all country specific resolutions, a reversal from their policy over the last two years, was "not a callous one" and was based on several factors. These included:

-- The Human Rights Council (HRC) was best suited to review human rights issues in a fair fashion. The HRC was created by unanimous vote by all members to specifically deal with these cases. The DG based their support of the HRC on the recent review of The Bahamas where "no stone was left unturned." The GCOB felt assured that "DPRK, Myanmar, and Iran will face stiff scrutiny" in the HRC.

-- The Bahamas, as a small nation, could be a target for similar resolutions in the future. (Note: The DG relayed to the Charge in a private conversation that the French could press The Bahamas on their treatment of Haitians or others might take issue with the announced resumption of capital punishment).

-- The Bahamas is vulnerable to different sanctions that might not otherwise affect a larger nation. The DG cited recent tax sanctions and the Human Rights Report as examples.

13. (C) The DG noted that The Bahamas' position on no-action votes has not changed and is consistent with the U.S. When pressed if the GCOB would consider voting on country-specific resolutions , the DG said that while this vote was based on the principle that the HRC was the appropriate body, "don't take it as a given" that they would never change their position. He said that conditions would dictate on a case-by-case basis how the GCOB will vote and that if they felt Iran was not being held accountable in the HRC, The Bahamas would re-evaluate its position. The Bahamas vowed to monitor the HRC review of Iran over the next year and if " Iran's feet are not held to the fire" this would cause The Bahamas to rethink its decision. When asked specifically by the CDA why they couldn't vote this year on the Iran Resolution and queried if Iran had applied pressure, the DG responded that they received no pressure from Iran and that Iran has no presence in The Bahamas. He said that all the member states of the UN agreed that the HRC was the appropriate forum to discuss these issues. He fully expected Iran to be held accountable.

Confusion Within the Ministry

14. (C) Post demarched the MFA at three levels prior to the vote; the Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister and Prime Minister both confirmed to the CDA that The Bahamas would be voting with the U.S. on both the No-Action and country-specific votes. Meanwhile, the Ministry had already conducted the internal review led by the DG and decided that it was going to break their previous standing and abstain on all country-specific votes. This apparent lack of communication within the Ministry may indicate the level or lack of control the DPM exerts over his staff. The shift in policy was only communicated to Post after a foreign diplomat told our representative in NY that The Bahamas changed their position.

Comment

14. (C) Despite direct pressure from The Ambassador to the Prime Minister, The Bahamas elected to abstain on principle on all country-specific votes. The change is likely more a reflection of the pressure brought to bear on a small nation. Changes to U.S. policy on off-shore banking and tax collection directly effects their second largest industry, negative statements in the Human Rights Report and Trafficking in Person Report are seen as unwelcome and even as a threat to tourism. Post believes The Bahamas with early and strong engagement from Post and Washington could change their position on subsequent votes.

ZUNIGA-BROWN